

# Hayes Is For Horses



*Be A Better Human, Be A Better Horse*

## Your Horse is Never Wrong

By Tim Hayes

**H**ave you ever watched or ridden your friend's horse and thought: "I wish my horse was like that." Have you ever known the husband or wife of one of your friends and thought "Gee, they're terrific. I wish my spouse was more like them." When you were growing up did you ever hear a parent say to their kid: "Why can't you be more like your friend "Mary or Bob"?"

Not only are you not alone, you are part of a large majority of people who wish they could get their partner (human or horse) to change. Have you ever tried to get another person to change or behave differently? If you're like me you've tried it more than once and it hasn't worked yet.

It's taken me a lifetime to learn the only person in my life I can change or get to behave differently is me. Changing things about myself for the better can be very difficult and requires a lot of effort. However the outcome is usually a double win. Not only do I improve and feel better about myself but others seem to miraculously change for the better as well. This axiom not only works with humans, it works identically with horses that need a positive change in attitude and behavior. Ironically most horse owners rarely practice it.

Years ago one of my teachers Tom Dorrance said: "The horse is never wrong." Not only did I not believe this when I heard it but I had no knowledge or understanding of the basis of Tom's statement. Today I know it's true, I understand why and it's become one of the principles in my Natural Horsemanship program. The moment I am able to help my



Reading a horse at Tim's Clinic - horse has his attention on Tim. All photos courtesy of Tim Hayes

students comprehend this fact, their riding and their horsemanship dramatically begins to improve. Here it is.

The vast majority of all horse behavior is motivated by some aspect of self-preservation. Horses know that they're prey

animals and therefore food for predator animals. Every decision they make is preceded with a thought: "Does what I'm about to do or not do put my survival in jeopardy?" "If there is even a 001% chance that their action could put them in a vulnerable position, they will not do it."

When our horse resists our request (read: doesn't do what we want, does what we don't want, disobeys, acts up, shuts down, ignores us, etc.) it is usually for one of 4 reasons all of which are originally motivated by his need for self-preservation: Fear, Disrespect, Pain, Misunderstanding. The following are some examples:

**Fear** - "I'm not going in there! My human calls it a horse trailer. It looks to me like a dark metal cave with only one way out. Predators live in caves. Going in there doesn't seem like a good idea. I know my human loves me, why on earth would he not only ask me but force me to do this?"

**Disrespect** - "For my survival I will always decide what's best for me unless I have found a leader I love, trust and respect (read: mother or alpha herd member). I know who my leader is. They have earned their leadership by the way they treat me. They understand I'm a horse, always look out for my safety and have proven they will never compromise my self-preservation in any of their requests. I do not completely trust or respect any horse or human who doesn't demonstrate these qualities."

**Pain** - "When I am hurt, injured or in pain I am more vulnerable to predators. To survive it is in my best interest to rest and heal and not make the situation worse."

**Misunderstanding** - "If I'm not 100% clear on what is being asked of me it is safer to not act. I will wait until I'm certain rather than do something that could cause me to become vulnerable."

If you don't know this and don't learn to read horses in order to respond appropriately to these 4 very different behaviors, you will not only continually struggle, you'll probably never ride your horse the way you always dreamed you would.

Natural Horsemanship teaches us to see our relationship from the horses' point of view and what is natural for him. When we do we discover not only do his actions make perfect sense, but given the same circumstances we would probably behave exactly the same way. When we consider that horses don't speak English but communicate with body language and physical actions, it instantly becomes apparent that every time they resist they are telling us in the only way they know



Reading a horse at Tim's Clinic - horse has his attention away from Tim. All photos courtesy of Tim Hayes

*Tying-Up continued from page 8*

Diagnosis of PSSM must be confirmed by a muscle biopsy.

Once again, proper management is imperative for the care of PSSM horses. Because PSSM horses have trouble utilizing glycogen for energy, a diet low in carbohydrates may be an effective way to decrease glycogen accumulation in the skeletal muscle<sup>7</sup>. Indeed, research<sup>8</sup> indicates that equine diets that are low in carbohydrates and higher in fat may reduce incidences of tying-up, possibly because of the increased availability of free fatty acids as an energy source, and a lower response of insulin to a higher fat diet (thus less glycogen accumulation in muscle cells).

In summary, tying up is a condition that causes painful muscle contractions in the horse. While the condition can take on various forms, proper management, training and a balanced diet are essential components to minimize episodes. Increase the demands of exercise slowly and minimize stress in the horse's environment. Knowing exactly what form of tying up one's horse is dealing with makes management considerably easier, and proper diagnosis and veterinary treatment will help the horse to avoid symptoms and live more comfortably. You know your horse best, and always consult your vet if you have concerns about your horse's health. Happy Riding, and stay warm!

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*Barbaro continued from page 23*

Regardless of all the modern miracles of veterinary science, a healthy horse still needs all 4 legs to ultimately survive. The old adage, "No foot, no horse" is still perfectly correct. Laminitis is a terrible villain that preys upon injured horses bodies and feet; even those afforded the best of veterinary medical care. The circumstances, causes, treatments and cures for laminitis still remain as unacceptably evasive as they were when they caused the unavoidable premature loss of Secretariat. Just like race horses themselves, each race horse injury is unique and no two are identical. Even under the most ideal circumstances, each incident has its own unique set of odds for success or for failure. Modern veterinary medicine should be administered and so assessed on a case by case basis.

While we work hard every day to improve our profession and our performance, we don't have all the answers. While some may argue that we need improved track surfaces to minimize these breakdown incidences, others will argue that we need better veterinary breakthroughs for fixing them. My personal opinion is that we are also too complacent in our pre-race screening and in our

ability to protect horses from unknowingly being placed into these potentially life threatening situations in the first place. Several horses saved from a potential breakdown would not be as newsworthy; but they would be more valuable than the time, energy, emotion, financial resources, and the associated pain necessary to attempt a risky life-saving orthopedic procedure. Putting all things into perspective, Barbaro was afforded the best that his team had to offer; and to that end his team did a remarkably valiant job.

*Composed 1/30/07 by Dr. Gregory Beroza (HorseDoc Reports) Gregory Beroza, DVM, is a board-certified surgeon and practitioner. He is Director of the Long Island Equine Medical Center in Huntington, New York, and he has an office at Belmont Park. He writes articles under the title HorseDoc Reports with publication supplied by the Long Island Equine Medical Foundation. For more information visit www.HorseDoc.com.*

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how: "What you're asking of me is not in the best interest of my self-preservation. You must change how and what you're doing so I can completely understand, trust and respect you. Then I will be happy to respond with confidence, respect and enthusiasm."

The brilliance of Natural Horsemanship is it not only provides us with this mandatory equine knowledge (usually unavailable in "Traditional Horsemanship") it also teaches us how to actually communicate (speak and listen) with our horse in his language on the ground, and on his back. Then we know if he resists our request, he is telling us he's either afraid, doesn't respect our judgement, he's hurting or he doesn't understand. We realize these are reasonable, logical and understandable situations that require us to do something different. It requires us to change. We become a better human in the process and they become a better horse.

With the right help and new information our change will cause him to change. The "problem" is "fixed", our relationship improves, we both feel safer and everything becomes fun again. Not only is our horse never wrong, but if we listen to him, we discover he's our greatest teacher.

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